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ABSTRACT

This occasional paper discusses and examines how well or how poorly history is faring in U.S. schools by noted historians. D. Stephen Elliott of Colonial Williamsburg, describes how focus group discussions improved the delivery of history at Williamsburg. Claudia Hoone, fourth-grade teacher at Public School 58 in Indianapolis, advocates using methods of historical investigation to enliven student learning and draw them into history. John Lewis Gaddis of the Contemporary History Institute of Ohio University discusses the changing definition of "contemporary" and how the struggle is to retain the sense of immediacy that can come from any subject in history. Barbara J. Fields, Columbia University, examines how history can be used most accurately to demonstrate that race is a historical process, not a biological fact or an innate and primordial prejudice. Spencer Crew of the National Museum of American History of the Smithsonian Institution explains how "story and stuff" must be included in history in order to make it something in which people participate. Lewis Laphan, editor of "Harper's Magazine," proffers how the teaching of history is a necessity to give people a sense of their kinship with a wider self and a historical perspective of events. (EH)

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OCCASIONAL PAPER

National Council for History Education, Inc.

promoting history in school and society

Advancing History Education In American Schools

a Symposium at the Library of Congress, March 1-2, 1996

Panel 2

D. Stephen Elliott, *Vice President for Education, Colonial Williamsburg, and Panel Moderator*

Good afternoon, my name is Steve Elliott. We are all here following up on an assessment study about how well or how poorly history is faring in schools. Someone asked me on the break, "How do you assess the success of what you teach at a historic site or museum?"

Of course the long answer is that we do assessments and evaluation studies of our visitors, whether they are school children or adults, like anybody else. But, the best short answer I have is that we also do focus group interviews. In our last two years we have been working hard at improving our children and family programming and our school group visits and services to school groups. We had a focus group in the summer of 1994. The focus group is in one room, the adults and the children talking with the interviewer, and we have a video link to the next room where some of the staff are. The interviewer is going around the table saying, "What brought you here? How was your visit?"

The most thoughtful answer was an African-American grandmother who had brought her grandchildren and said, "I just felt that my grandchildren needed to see their part of history." The reason that answer was so touching to the staff was, fifteen years ago you would have had to search hard for that history at Colonial Williamsburg in the first place. The fact that a grandmother was bringing her grandchildren made it all the more rewarding for the staff. So, that was met with a grateful and appreciative silence.

However, there was also a father with his family from the Midwest and they had come to the East Coast to spend a week vacationing at Ocean City. He said, "Well, we thought since we were so close we would come to Williamsburg and we would get the kids to go to Colonial Williamsburg and we would spend a couple of days at Busch Gardens." Now we get along famously with Busch Gardens, and we work very well with them, but what he said was, "We have been here four days. The kids have not asked to go to Busch Gardens yet." And what was embarrassing was the staff cheered. That is the short way we measure our success.

> ***We cannot wait until fifth grade or until middle school to begin significant historical studies. Very young children, even troubled children, are capable of learning and using methods of historical investigation, of using time lines which help children to recognize cause and effect. These children can explore primary source material.***
>
> *—Claudia Hoone*

Claudia J. Hoone, *Grade Four Teacher, Public School #58, Indianapolis, Indiana*

A couple of weeks ago, I was working with another teacher on a history project involving cooking and time lines. Our students were members of a developmental first grade class. That means the class was created so that the school wouldn't have to retain 18 kids in Kindergarten. The project involved making a four-step candy recipe, an old recipe which had been given to us by the grandparent of one of the children. As the children completed each of the four steps, they drew a picture illustrating what they had done and when the cooking and the drawing was completed, the children cut out their four pictures and pasted them on time lines we had prepared in advance. From left to right we had simply written under a horizontal line 1, 2, 3, and 4. The children had to sequence the steps from left to right in time order. All 18 of those children were able to do this correctly. All were beginning to understand how to use time lines.

In the high schools across our country, there is a trend towards the use of twelfth grade exit exams. Our communities want some kind of evidence that our elaborate, expensive twelve-year programs are producing sound results, and rightly so. Several years ago Diane Ravitch and Chester Finn published the book **What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?** This book was like a 911 call to educators and to the public regarding the state of emergency in our nation's school systems. Today, the result of the NAEP test for U.S. history sent us loud echoes of the same sad news. Our children don't know what they must know.

Resolving the problem is like piecing together a puzzle with concerned educators, historians and members of the public each adding their key pieces. From my viewpoint, as an elementary teacher, a puzzle piece that I want to add to this solution is this: *we cannot wait until fifth grade or until middle school to begin significant historical studies*. Very young children, even troubled children, are capable of learning and using methods of historical investigation, of using time lines which help children to recognize cause and effect. These children can explore primary source material. They can learn about recipes and clothing and games from other generations. All these things fan the fire of inquisitiveness that seems to be a natural gift, even a need of these very young children. Too often we meet children in the seventh grade or in high school who think of history lessons as a time to catch up on their sleep, and why wouldn't they? That notion comes perhaps from their elementary school memories of watered down, simple, sometimes "cute" social studies lessons that were always stuck at the end of the day when everyone, including the teacher, was straining to hear the sound of the buses arrive.

I'm going to mention two reasons why history instruction has been so poorly served in the elementary schools. They aren't the only two reasons, but I see them at work everywhere I go, not just from my own experience in my classroom. One is the belief that young children are not capable of understanding controversial viewpoints, past-to-present-to-future relationships, and the impact that individuals and groups of people have on one another. But I have seen tremendous progress in these areas through the efforts of groups like the Bradley Commission on History in Schools and Hirsch's Core Knowledge Foundation.

The second, and to me the most confounding cause of poor history instruction in the elementary schools, is the way that standardized testing is used. In grades 1-6, history may or may not be a part of the yearly achievement test structure but the "high stakes" testing usually involves math and the language arts. How high stakes are those tests? I'll use my own experience as an example. In the State of Indiana for the past several years, children who do not reach a state-determined level on the math and language arts state-sponsored test must be retained, even if there has been a full year of class work indicating reasonable growth for that child. Schools that do not reach state-determined levels in math and language arts will lose money, sometimes lots of money.

But the stakes go higher than that. In the In-

dianapolis public school system, a new law created by our mayor and passed by the State Legislature has gone into effect this year. Now, reading and math achievement scores are used as a key part of a teacher's personal evaluation and can even be used as a basis for transferring or firing teachers. Within some school buildings, the math and reading scores from last year have been posted on computer print-outs beside each teacher's name, and the test scores for each grade level in all the system schools are published and compared in the local newspapers. We have been told that beginning this year, some of the schools may be closed or privatized based on math and reading scores. On Monday, when I'm back at school, and all through the State of Indiana, we will begin this year's two-week battery of achievement testing. Knowing the weight that math and language arts test scores carry, you can guess how much instruction in history, geography and the sciences our kids have been getting.

Our schools must be accountable. Assessment is vital to improvement. But assessment must be a North Star; it must not be an axe.

John L. Gaddis,
Contemporary History Institute, Ohio University

I want to focus my remarks this afternoon on one particular finding from the NAEP Report on History, one that certainly caught my eye when I saw it. It's that only 26% of eighth graders and 47% of twelfth graders could correctly identify the most important goal shaping United States foreign policy during the Cold War. As I pondered this finding, my thoughts immediately turned to toast. Not the kind you have for breakfast but the kind our kids talk about as a none-too-delicate euphemism for anything out-of-date or defunct or dead. "That's toast" they will say scornfully. And the object of this contempt, whether it's last year's rock group or last month's earring style or last week's Republican Primary front runner, is expected simply to molder away quietly, perhaps leaving one or two crumbs behind.

The Cold War is my field, I was saying to myself as I thought about these statistics, and these kids are saying it's toast. Then I went on to mutter something else, something about how this couldn't have happened back in the good old days when the Cold War was "hot," when kids used to do duck-and-cover drills under their desk, and when the word "toast" had an entirely different meaning. But then I thought, no, in a way, this is progress. Had the NAEP test been given in 1954 or in 1964 or maybe even in 1984, the students' scores on this question would have been much higher. But the world they would have been living in would also have been much more dangerous. The absence of danger, I'm sure, is partly what accounts for their absence of information on this point and that's not an entirely bad thing.

Our students are not being at all unreasonable when they demand of us, "What does all of this have to do with me? Why should I care about such things as the Peloponnesian Wars, or the South Sea Bubble, or the populist revolt in Kansas in the 1890's?" It is up to us, not to tell them, but to help them discover this for themselves.

—John Gaddis

But then I thought, what this really means is that my field, which used to straddle the line between current events and regular old history, now falls firmly into that latter category. Cold War history is now back there with the Punic Wars, the Protestant Reformation, and the Progressive Movement. And that, I'm afraid, is going to make our task in teaching it a good deal more difficult. We Cold War historians now find ourselves in the

same boat with everyone else who teaches all the rest of history. And that's a sobering thought.

So, what to do? Well, one of the things we do in the Contemporary History Institute at Ohio University is to wrestle with this whole question of how to make history relevant, with how to avoid having it come across as stale toast. My own conclusion is that one of the best ways to do this is to try to teach all of history, no matter how far back you go, as contemporary history. There are sound methodological reasons for proceeding in this manner. All judgments about the past, even the choices we make in choosing what we focus on from the past, reflect who we are now and what we think is important now. If that were not the case we'd still be trying to teach history by having our students memorize the dates of dynasties. We would not be giving the attention that we do to people and problems once considered not worth noting. We decide, or at least the authors of our textbooks and the committees that rule on their adoption decide for us, what's important. We make those judgments influenced by what our values and our priorities are now, not what they might have been 50 or 100 years ago. So the contemporary world thus influences what we teach and write, even about the most distant events in the past. That's one reason that I would argue that all history is inescapably contemporary history.

But there is another more practical reason why I think we should think of history in this way. If we teach all history as contemporary history, then it's much less likely to come across as stale toast. Our students are not being at all unreasonable when they demand of us, "What does all of this have to do with me? Why should I care about such things as the Peloponnesian Wars, or the South Sea Bubble, or the populist revolt in Kansas in the 1890's?" It is up to us, not to tell them, but to help them discover this for themselves. And that is another sense in which all history is, or can be, or should be contemporary history.

Let me take that last example of Kansas in the 1890's to illustrate what I mean. How might you get your students interested in Sockless Jerry Simpson or in Pitchfork Ben Tillman? If I faced that task, I would enlist a little help from Pat Buchanan, who, after all, explained his own unexpected political success the other day by warning that the peasants were coming with their pitchforks. Well, of course there aren't too many peasants in New Hampshire these days; and I guess there weren't all that many in Kansas 100 years ago, and of course, Pitchfork Ben was from South Carolina and not Kansas anyway; but let all of that pass. Where did this image of rebellious Republican peasants come from in the first place? And how might you use it as a teaching device? And what might any of this have to do with my own field of Cold War history?

Well, the Cold War ended, as we all know, in a triumph for democratic politics and market economics. But, we also know that history itself did not end, for a very simple reason: people don't always vote the way economists think. Karl Marx suggested a very long time ago, that unrestricted capitalism produces uneven distributions of wealth, which leads in turn to social alienation, which then gives rise to class conflict, which is not at all a bad diagnosis of the politics of 1996. Where people can't vote, the effects can be, as Marx suggested, revolutionary. But where they can (and this he saw a little less clearly), the results have historically been radical critiques that in turn have evolved into mainstream reforms. Where did Progressivism, the New Deal, the European social welfare states originate, if not from a sense that people were being buffeted back and forth by economic forces that they didn't understand, and that the only way they saw to control them was through more and not less government intervention?

So there may be a cycle here. To paraphrase Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, "...It looks like we may be back in Kansas again, Toto," but this may not be good news for Bob Dole. I think we are likely to see people wanting **more** government when they see what the consequences of having **less** government really are for their everyday lives. This is more than just an American phenomenon. In fact, it's the best explanation I know for why the communists, of all people, are

now winning elections and not rigging elections in places like Poland and Russia. You may ask "Pat Buchanan and the communists on the same side? Is that plausible?" But if you look at what each of them are saying about big market capitalism and their effects on little people, they have a good deal more in common than you might think.

That's my sense of how we should be teaching history. The reason students forty years ago would have scored higher on that question about American policy in the Cold War, was that it was for them a matter of life and death. Therefore, it had a certain immediacy. They could relate it to their own lives. We have lost that sense of danger now, and that's no bad thing. But I don't see any reason why we have to lose the sense of immediacy that can come from any subject in history, if it's taught well, if we take the trouble to present it in such a way that we offer our kids more for breakfast than just stale toast.

➳ **Barbara J. Fields**, *Department of History, Columbia University*

I propose to use my few minutes to talk about the crucial importance of history in teaching students to recognize nonsense when they hear it in discussions of that perennial American topic, race. History is perhaps the only discipline—certainly the only one in the social sciences and humanities—that, properly taught, will teach them to do so. Political science, sociology (especially in its most naive-empiricist, survey-research guise), and economics habitually take it for a given, assuming what they need to prove. The public controversy surrounding **The Bell Curve** offers ample evidence of that. There was scarcely an audible public voice asking why anyone should take seriously a purported statistical analysis of the heritability of "racial" characteristics when the authors failed to tackle, or even recognize, the underlying problem of how to identify "races" in the first place. And after all, how could they? Two hundred years of diligent searching have failed to uncover a single trait that can be used to divide the human species into racial groups: Every one the bio-racists have tried has proved to vary more within purported races than between them. Literary theory, frequently dragging anthropology and cultural studies along as satellites, claims to have superseded the concept of race, but an elaborate vocabulary of euphemistic synonyms—culture, multiculture, difference, diversity, the Other, marginalization, and hybridity—demonstrates that its followers have done no more than tog race up in fancy dress.

It is easy enough to demonstrate for students the logical absurdity of the concept. I often begin by asking my students rhetorically how race can possibly represent biological subdivisions of the human species if there is only one; and, by the well-understood rules of racial classification in this country, there *is* only one. The one-drop-of-blood, or any-known-ancestry rule identifies people of African descent as a race. But if that rule identifies one race, it cannot logically identify any other: as soon as you add a second, the rule breaks down for the first. All Americans are familiar with this as a practical matter, whether or not we have examined it as a logical proposition. Most of us do not even find paradoxical the fact that, while a white woman mating with a black man produces a black child, a black woman mating with a white man does not produce a white child.

I have even developed a device for jarring students from their assumption, born of habituation, that race is real because they can see it. After laying out the biological facts for them, I pause, look around the room, and then say to them with a smile: "You may not want to admit it, but I am prepared to bet that most of you are thinking to yourselves: What is she talking about? I can look at people and see that they look different." Then I propose an experiment. "Everyone look at the person seated on your right," I tell them. "Raise your hands, everyone who sees someone there of a different 'race' from yourself." Since I teach at Columbia, most of my students are white and therefore most do not raise their hands. For some of you, most will not raise their hands because most are Afro-American. It does not matter. As long as some do not raise their hands—because they see a person of the same race next to them—the device

will work.

Then I say to the students, "Most of you did not raise your hands, so I conclude that you saw next to you a person of the same race. Among those who saw a person of the same race, I now want to see the hands of everyone who saw a person who looks exactly like you." Of course no hands go up, not even if there are identical twins in the class, because no two people, not even identical twins, look exactly alike. At that point I say to the students, "I trust you have all seen the point. If physical differences alone were enough to mark people as belonging to different races, then everyone in this room would have seen next to him or her a person of a different race. We are trained from our earliest years to recognize and classify certain physical characteristics as indicating race. The methods by which we learn may be as casual and benign as a conversation in which a four-year-old boy, asked by his mother whether a playmate was black, answered 'No, he's brown,' to be met by his mother's indulgent chuckle. Of just such casual and well-meant moments as that is our adult certainty of the reality of race built. Because we are so habituated, we assume that it is nature, and not we ourselves, that has marked these characteristics and organized people into races on the strength of them."

It is easy enough to reach this point, at which the students are usually both enlightened and disturbed, because what they regarded as stable landmarks have suddenly shifted, as in an earthquake. That is the moment when recourse to history is essential. If race is not the invention of nature, it is the invention of human beings. What human beings invent, they invent for a reason and at a definable time. The historian's task is to probe for the time, the reason, and the process.

The social sciences, social studies, anthropology, literary theory, and prevailing public discussion will not suffice to draw students away from the scientifically discredited and politically disastrous understanding of race that holds sway even in educated circles in this country. For that, only informed and adept history instruction will do.

—Barbara Fields

To demonstrate that race is a historical process, not a biological fact or an innate and primordial prejudice, I begin by illustrating the concrete steps in that process. I then lay out the history of indentured servitude for persons of European descent, and the reasons why African or African-descended slaves-for-life eventually replaced European servants-for-a-term as the major source of labor for the tobacco plantations. I tell them that freedom did not become possible for Americans of European descent until Americans of European descent had established slavery for Americans of African descent, had defined Afro-Americans as a biological race, and had identified biological inferiority as the justification for enslavement. It was during the era of the American Revolution that that ideology coalesced, in the debate between proponents and opponents of slavery. Thus, it was during the era of the American Revolution that the Siamese twins, American democracy and American racial ideology, were born.

The prevalence of freedom created the extraordinary situation calling for the extraordinary invention that American racial ideology represented in its context of time and place. English people might find Africans and their descendants to be heathen as to religion, outlandish as to nationality, and weird as to appearance. But that did not add up to an ideology of racial inferiority until a further ingredient got

stirred into the mixture: the incorporation of Africans and their descendants into a polity and society in which they lacked rights that others not only took for granted, but claimed as a matter of self-evident natural law.

A special rationale for bondage is needed when freedom is widely seen as something to be assumed as part of the natural order. *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*: it is a great mistake to dismiss those famous lines from the Declaration of Independence as mere abstract rhetoric or the vaporings of intellectuals. By the era of the Revolution, Americans looking around them could see that most people were in fact free of slavery and servitude, the major exception being a minority of African descent. In other words, the everyday world encouraged Americans to define freedom as a self-evident natural right, to which persons of African descent were an anomalous and highly visible exception. The same everyday world called for a rationale equally self-evident and equally natural to account for the massive exception. People holding liberty to be "unalienable" and holding Afro-Americans as slaves were bound to end by holding race to be a self-evident truth.

Americans of European descent invented race during the era of the American Revolution as a way of resolving the contradiction between a natural right to freedom and the fact of slavery. But Americans of *African* descent did not need the detour and, therefore, did not invent themselves as a race. If you think about it, there are two ways to resolve a contradiction between a natural right to freedom and the fact of slavery. One is to explain why some people are an exception to the rule of natural rights. The other is to call for the abolition of slavery. Euro-Americans took the first method, and defined Afro-Americans as a race. Afro-Americans took the second route and called for the abolition of slavery. Petitions by slaves of the Revolutionary era asking for their freedom make it clear that the slaves understood natural right to extend to them as well as to Americans of European descent. They understood the reason for their enslavement to be, as Frederick Douglass later put it, "not *color*, but *crime*, not *God*, but *man*." You will search the historical record in vain for evidence that Afro-Americans contributed significantly to the voluminous literature purporting to prove their innate biological inferiority.

The time allotted is too short for me to do more than skim the surface of this problem. I hope that I have skimmed it enough, however, to make clear that the social sciences, social studies, anthropology, literary theory, and prevailing public discussion will not suffice to draw students away from the scientifically discredited and politically disastrous understanding of race that holds sway even in educated circles in this country. For that, only informed and adept history instruction will do.

➳ **Spencer Crew**, *National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution*

I'm here this afternoon to echo the point made this morning about the importance of having history in history. But I want to add another element to what is important to have in history. It's a very technical museum term so you have to excuse me for that. But I think we ought to include "story and stuff" in history. This comes out of a sense of my experiences over the last month and over the last several years. In particular, over the last month, because as all of you probably know very well, last month was African American History Month. For me, it's a time to get out of the museum, to get out into the community and to talk with people, to interact with people and to begin to get a sense of their understanding of what history is all about and why it's important to them. It is a reminder to me of why African American History Month is so important and where its roots really lie. Because, what made Carter G. Woodson have this month and make it so successful, was his idea of getting back out to the people, to making history not a professional experience, but making it something that everyone could participate in. Why it took off and why it went from a day, to a week, to a month, is because he got local historians,

teachers, everyone involved in the idea of history and its belonging to everyone who wanted to be a part of it.

For me, when I go out and do these lectures and talks, I have a chance to watch local communities respond to history in a different kind of way than one might otherwise. The best example that I can offer right away, is the trip I made a couple of weeks ago to Des Moines, Iowa. At that time, I had a chance to travel to the Iowa Historical Society which had just opened a new exhibition. It focused on a local African-American businessman who had operated his business in that community for more than 50 years. He opened it in 1910 and he died in the 1960's. His family was wise enough upon his death, and after urban renewal, to save his business papers and other aspects of his life and to give them to the museum. What the museum did was to put together a very wonderful exhibition in conjunction with that local community. They sat down and talked to people about what was important. What does this mean? What does this photograph indicate? What does this tell us about our community? What does this tell us about the African-American community of Des Moines?

What resulted from that discussion was a really exquisite exhibition. One in which the community felt a part of the process and involved in telling their own story. For me, it was a wonderful chance to get a sense of the African-American community in Des Moines as it developed over the last century. A chance to see what were the major organizations in that community, what were the critical events for those people as they defined it, and who were the important individuals in the black community in Des Moines. These are not people you necessarily would have learned about had you read the Des Moines newspaper for the rest of the community. These people might not have popped up, but they were critical in understanding the nature of the African-American community in Des Moines. For me, it was really wonderful to watch how the citizens responded to this information. Everyone was gathered around the displays very excitedly. Each person was looking for things and people and events that they remembered or had heard about or talked to their parents about, and now it was coming to life. It was something very magical for me to see this happening. But even more important was watching what was happening between children and parents and grandparents—watching parents take their kids through this exhibition and pointing out to them events and ideas and pieces of history that their kids had not known about, or people they might have heard about vaguely but who now were becoming real as a consequence of this experience.

Essentially, what was happening was the transmission of history from one generation to the other. I think that's what we should be thinking about when we do history. How do we make it exciting? How do we make it real? How do we transmit this information from one generation to the other in a way that the other generation will embrace it, will feel its importance, and will make it an integral part of their lives? I think this is a critical issue for us to think about, both in the classroom and in museums. That is, how do we make history a part of our internal definition of ourselves? How do we get people involved in history and feeling more positive about history? History is an important way in which we define ourselves within our culture, and as citizens of this country. The better we understand that connection, the more effective we're going to be as people trying to educate others about history.

Now, one of the ways you do this is to use local examples, to put the "me" back into history. So that, for individuals, as they look at it and study it, they find a context in which they fit. I think the speakers before me have talked in very wonderful ways about how you can make connections between today and yesterday. I think the other way you can do it is by making it a much more local, personal event; by doing history in a context that gets people back into their own community, so that what you are talking about connects to their lives very directly; by having them do more oral histories in which they talk to individuals and begin to learn about how history played out in their lives.

One of the most wonderful things I've watched happen in museums between adults and children, especially grandparents and grandchildren (I've watched it in particular with my own children and their grandmother), is watching the adults take the children through an exhibition, especially one that talks about an aspect of their lives, and to begin to explain to them its meaning for them—its meaning for them as they were coming up and developing through life. It reveals a whole different aspect of history. Because suddenly, the adult was a child once. It is hard to believe because, for the children, the grown-up has always been an adult. She begins to relate to them what it meant to her to be a child at that time and what these kinds of events meant in her own life. And for the children suddenly, it connects to them at the same age or in a similar time. And it makes their lives, that history, have greater meaning and a greater, I think, sense of importance within their own existence.

But even more important was watching parents take their kids through this exhibition and pointing out to them events and ideas and pieces of history that their kids had not known about, or people they might have heard about vaguely but who now were becoming real as a consequence of this experience.

—Spencer Crew

So, the "me" part of it is very important in terms of just getting people connected to history and feeling a part of it. Oral history and local histories and family histories are important ways of doing this. I've had this reconfirmed by you who are teachers, as I have talked to you about these kinds of things. I can only reiterate how important I think it is.

The other aspect of this, though, is the "stuff" of history. I think we've talked a great deal over the last several hours about the importance of primary resources. But I think often, when we use that term, we tend to talk about written documents. Well, I'm here to say that those aren't the only kind of primary resources that exist in this world. There are three dimensional primary resources that are wonderful ways of getting people engaged in history. I think you ought to consider that issue through your own work in the field. In museums we use them all the time. I can't say we always use them to their best advantage, because I'm not sure we quite understand exactly how to use three dimensional objects to their best advantage for our visitors, but we still have had experiences that have taken us along that path and make us better at it than we have been in the past.

I think at our museum, the American History Museum, a wonderful example of that (I've been told this by educators at my place and by teachers who visit) is an operation we have called the Hands-on History Room. Basically, that is a place in the museum that children from 5 to 105 can visit and get a hands-on experience with various objects from history over time. Among the things they do when they go in that room is learn how to saddle a mule and how to put a bridle in its mouth. They learn how to make a wooden pail. They learn how to put on clothing and dress from a different era to see how it feels. They have a chance to look at games played by Native American children in an earlier period of time. A whole variety of things allow them to touch and feel and understand history in a way they couldn't otherwise.

I think there are important connections we need to make as we think about history and its transmission. One is the written sources which are critically important for people to understand. The other half of it is the tangible tactile sources. I think those things connected together can make

history exciting and something children and other individuals can really begin to connect with in a very important and a wonderful way. So, my argument to you today is to really think about the other dimension of primary resources. To think about those three dimensional things that make history exciting, can make history very real. I ask you to turn to museums as a place to begin to have those kind of discussions on a regular basis. As I said earlier, I will not claim that we understand entirely how best to do this. But the way we will learn to do it better and more effectively, is in partnerships with all of you who are teaching in the classroom. You have that day-to-day experience that will make us function better: how we can begin to work in a way that we can integrate what we're doing into your curriculum, and make us stop and make sense as we talk about history and change and evolution over time.

We have begun to do that at the Smithsonian. My office is not doing it, but our Office of Elementary and Secondary Education is involved in a nationwide process of interacting with teachers all over the country, having them come to the Institution and talking with that office, talking with curators, administrators, others around the Institution, and really beginning to talk back and forth about the process of doing work in exhibitions. What is the process of transmitting information in the classrooms and how do we find intersections between those two things? This has been a process that has been in place for about two years. And I know at our museum, we have been doing that same sort of thing with local teachers as a way of our finding out how we can make the connection work better. It is an ongoing process. It is one that I encourage all of you to look into in your own communities. I am sure that there are many museums that are looking for ways to make the connection work even better than it does now.

I know that many schools come to museums and have field trips there. But I think what we're looking to do, is to make it more than a field trip where you walk in, there is no preparation up front, and it's a momentary experience that the children shed later. I know I did that when I was a kid. It was sort of interesting but it didn't really make a difference. I think what we want to try to do is make museums make a difference in the lives of the students and to be a helpmate in the work that you do. I think if we can work in that direction more and more successfully and more and more cooperatively, history can come alive in another way. I know you have been searching for different avenues to follow and that we as museums can feel much more relevant and much more a part of the education system. Our belief is that we are educational institutions. It is critical for us to fulfill that role within the society and we are constantly searching for ways to do that better. My entreaty to you is to look upon us as friends and colleagues, not as enemies. Not as a place where you have to be quiet when you walk in, but rather as a place where we can encourage kids to be engaged, to be active, to be noisy, and to learn. If we can do that, I think we can all work together to make history more effective and much more important in the lives of our children.

Lewis Lapham, *Editor, **Harper's Magazine***

I feel like I'm traveling here under a forged passport. I'm not an historian. I'm actually a failed historian and an *historien manqué*. When I was in college, I intended to become a history professor and that's what it says in the yearbook. "What will you do when you grow up?" and it says "history professor." And then I lacked the fortitude to get through graduate school and went into journalism as a decided second best. So, without apology, as the editor of a magazine, I don't deal with the same kind of students you do, or classes, so I really don't know what your specific problems are. I do know that when writers come to **Harper's Magazine**, I'm surprised that so few of them have a grasp of the historical perspective in whatever it is that they are attempting to write about. Whether they are going to write about the arts or politics or education, even, the lack of historical knowledge as to what happened low these many years ago or even twenty years ago or even last year, is alarming to me. It's the same thing I see when the magazine hires interns straight out of very eminent uni-

versities. These are kids that are either between their senior year and first year in graduate school or maybe sometimes, right out of graduate school. I'm alarmed at how few of them (and these are people who've been to Yale, Harvard, Princeton, the high end of American education) have any historical understanding or knowledge. So, if I were trying to teach history, I would try to teach it as a necessity. I'd give it the sense of urgency and danger, because if you don't know where you came in in the story, you're at a distinct disadvantage in this kind of a society. You're at the mercy of the mass media. You're at the mercy of some of the political demagogues that come and go. You're at the mercy of the New York publishing business and critics who have no idea of what they are talking about, and so forth.

I would approach the teaching of history as a necessity, as a lifeline, trying to give people a sense of their kinship with a wider self.

—Lewis Lapham

We now spend, as you probably know, in the United States roughly 350 billion dollars in what is now the "Cold War Against the American Intellect." That is the sum of money spent on drugs, alcohol, pornography and the low end of narcotic television. That's a fairly formidable enemy. So, I would approach the teaching of history as a necessity, as a lifeline, trying to give people a sense of their kinship with a wider self. And I would try and start it in the present, if I could. I don't know how you do that as a teacher. I try to work back: why are you living on this block? And why are you sitting in this schoolroom? And why does the city look the way it looks? Or why is Bill Clinton President? Somehow start it with the now and then work it back, so they have some sense of narrative. Again, I am a complete believer in story. And during all my time in school, in the years that I went to both grammar school, high school and college, I only had two teachers (one in grammar school and one in high school) who had this magnificent gift for narrative. So that whether it was the Punic War or whether it was the Second Empire in France, it came very vividly alive. It was present. I mean, Louis Napoleon was as real to me as Eisenhower, who was then President of the United States. That, again, is talent and I don't know how you do it. Any way you do it is miraculous to me.

I am now trying to start my own second magazine, a history magazine, which I have been trying to raise money for several years. And I think I am almost on the verge of succeeding in that endeavor. It's a quarterly, and I would take a topic very much under the news or behind the headlines. Whether it is the debasement of currency, or the dissolution of nation and states, or the war between the generations, or the war between men and women, or the dream of utopia, you can all think of those kinds of subjects. And then compile a whole series of readings on precisely that topic which is now in the news, and go back to Herodotus or wherever you want to go back to, but a long way back. Then take it through, forward in time in chronological sequence. Use the original document, never any more than 3-4 pages, but not paraphrased—the real stuff, and fiction and nonfiction. So, it would be a passage from Herodotus, or a letter from Pliny, or a scene from Shakespeare, and so on.

I think that you have nothing out of which to build or make the future except the lumber of the past. And if you can present that to kids, as I try to do to my own writers, as a necessity, then an urgency, and get some of the danger back in it, then maybe you have the chance of holding their attention. But that is a challenge and I must compliment you for having to face that every day. I don't know what I would do under your circumstances.

The Moderator

D. Stephen Elliott is Vice President for Education of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. He is responsible for Historic Area presentations and tours, interpretative development and education, publishing, A-V productions, and visitor orientation with a staff of 710. Educated as a historian at Cornell and the College of William and Mary, he was deeply involved in the 1995 NCHE National Conference at Colonial Williamsburg.

The Panelists

Claudia Hoone is, and has been since 1968, a teacher of grades 1-6 in the Indianapolis Public Schools. She has also written for textbook publishing companies. Claudia was a commissioner for the Bradley Commission on History in Schools and a member of the National Assessment of Educational Progress for U.S. History Planning Committee.

John Lewis Gaddis is Professor of History at Ohio University. He is currently working at the Woodrow Wilson Institûte on the biography of George F. Kennan. He has recently written a reassessment of Cold War history using, and in light of, the many documents now available from the former U.S.S.R., which will come out from Oxford University Press next year in a book entitled **We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History**.

Barbara Fields received her Bachelor's Degree from Harvard and her graduate degrees from Yale and has been teaching at Columbia University since 1986. Her field is 19th Century American Southern and Social History, Civil War and Reconstruction. She is the author of **Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the 19th Century**, has been a co-editor of several documentary histories of slavery and freedom in the Civil War, and is a prolific author of articles.

Spencer Crew joined The Smithsonian in 1981, after completing his work at Brown and Rutgers and teaching at the University of Maryland, and in 1994 became the Director of the National Museum of American History. He is very active in both the historical education and museum fields.

Lewis Lapham is the editor of **Harper's Magazine**. Lewis has been a newspaper reporter for the *San Francisco Examiner* and the *New York Herald Tribune*, was managing editor of **Harper's** and then became editor of **Harper's** in 1976. He has published syndicated newspaper columns, hosted radio and television programming, and continues to write books and essays in the magazine, for which he has received the National Magazine Award. The title of his most recent book is **Hotel America**.